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Stories of Hope: Multiple Myeloma



**Byron Jenkins** was every bit the Top Gun. As a Navy fighter pilot he flew F-14's, the kind of plane featured in the movie Top Gun. An accomplished athlete in college Byron was the epitome of good health, until one day in June 2013 when he jumped into a swimming pool and almost died. He was rushed to the hospital and diagnosed with multiple myeloma, an incurable blood cancer.

The cancer had eaten through Byron's bones, causing his neck to collapse. He underwent surgery, then chemotherapy and radiation. It held the cancer at bay, for a while, but then it returned. Over the course of the next five years Byron underwent several more rounds of chemotherapy, radiation, immunotherapy, and other experimental procedures. He says he was bed ridden, exhausted, barely able to move. Byron says: "I was alive, but I wasn't living."

As the treatments lost their ability to hold the cancer at bay, Byron's wife, family and close friends had made preparations for his seemingly inevitable demise.

Then Byron took part in a CIRM-funded CAR-T clinical trial for a treatment developed by Poseida Therapeutics. The team used Byron's own immune system stem cells, re-engineered in the lab, to recognize the cancer and to fight back. Within two weeks Byron was feeling so much better he was able to stop taking all of his medications. "I haven't taken so much as an aspirin since then."

More than three years later he is once again able to enjoy a full, active life with his family; biking, hiking and skiing with his wife and kids. He is back working full-time and only checks in with his oncologist once in a while.

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